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SPEECH
OF
HON. ANTHONY MICHALEK
OF ILLINOIS
IN THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, February 18, 1907



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The House having under consideration the conference report on the bill (S. 4403) to amend an act entitled "An act to regulate the immigration of aliens into the United States," approved March 3, 1903—

Mr. MICHALEK said:

Mr. SPEAKER: While there are some provisions in this bill which are of doubtful value and the necessity of which I can not at this time see, yet I believe that the measure in other respects is an improvement upon our present immigration laws, and I shall therefore vote for the adoption of this conference report.

I do not favor the head-tax compromise; and if it were not for the fact that the parliamentary situation is such as to prohibit the offering of any amendments, I should move to reduce this tax from four to two dollars, which is the amount of the head tax under our present immigration act. Also to strike out the section the enforcement of which is left to the scientific (?) "guess" of the examining surgeon, as to whether persons of poor physique can or can not earn a living. This provision and its practical effect and operation will unjustly affect a certain virile, though not physically robust, race.

I am glad to note the absence of the educational-test amendment from this bill, the incorporation of which, in my judgment, would unreasonably restrict desirable immigration and not have any material effect in barring undesirables.

The provision for the creation of a commission to investigate this subject and report its findings to Congress is a step in the right direction and ought to result in a harmonious solution of this question.

While many of us in and out of Congress honestly differ in our opinions on various phases of this immigration question, it will perhaps not be amiss for me to remind you and the country in general in this connection that nothing is gained, and a great deal of friction caused, putting it briefly and bluntly, by the indiscriminate and lamentably ignorant classification of certain nationalities of eastern and southern Europe as "Dagoes" by certain writers and professional reformers in the guise of slum workers.

These people seem to have and preserve a stubborn mental antipathy toward a white person not born in this country, and what is more to be regretted, are prone to make him feel like an alien at every opportunity that presents itself, although in thought and feeling he may be a better American than the one who traces his ancestry to the landing of the Pilgrims.

Let us not draw our conclusions of the foreign element in our midst by impressions of them created when they first land or are here a short time. Let us readjust those first impressions and conclusions to their relation to us as a nation that the powerful influence of Americanization inevitably brings.

This so-called white immigration problem is, in my humble opinion, a question largely of proper distribution. I am glad to see that there is in this bill a provision authorizing the establishment of a bureau of information for the special purpose of dealing with this most important phase of this question. I sincerely hope that it will accomplish its purpose.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this report would not have been agreed upon by the conference committees had it not been for the interjection of the Japanese question. With regard to the Roosevelt amendment and the reasons that caused its insertion, I regret to note that the big stick has dwindled, sir, to the magnificent dimensions of a toothpick. [Laughter.]

Now, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, and you gentlemen of this House, by what law of human reasoning based upon the logic of the situation can we, the greatest nation of the West, kowtow to the little pampered bully of the East [applause on the Democratic side], whose self-asserted greatness lies solely in his

highly developed sense of imitation and in his recent success in the art of glorified murder, which is the plain term for war?

The SPEAKER. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. MICHALEK. Just one moment more. And in common justice to labor——

The SPEAKER. The gentleman's time has expired. Does the gentleman from New York yield?

Mr. BENNET of New York. I should like to, but can not, as I have promised all the time I have.

Mr. JAMES. I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman may have further time.

The SPEAKER. Is there objection? [After a pause.] The Chair hears none.

Mr. MICHALEK. Mr. Speaker, at the last session of this Congress I have sat and listened to and read several speeches of gentlemen who declaimed loudly against the immigrant from Russia, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. I have heard these peoples, with centuries of civilization and culture behind them, denounced as unfit for American citizenship and as tending to corrupt our morals, lower our ideals, and debase our national life, and through the infusion of their blood bring about the mental and physical degeneracy of the people of this country.

And yet we are confronted with the spectacle of a nation hardly emerged from barbarism treated with a consideration by this nation that seems to imply some wondrous superiority of this branch of the yellow race over the white races.

And, strange as it may seem, I heard no denunciation or even a criticism of the Japanese by the Members of this House who so feelingly portrayed the evils of this European immigration and its detrimental effect upon the American people.

Mr. Speaker, I am for the State of California as against any race or nation, because it is an American State and a part of the United States. I am with the people of California, because this Japanese question is the Chinese question with another name. [Applause.]

Whatever may be said in criticism of the San Francisco school officials' attitude on the school question, it can not be

contended that their demands were any violation of any treaty between the United States and Japan.

In my opinion the Federal Government has no constitutional right to interfere in the management of the schools of any State; and its interference in local matters is hardly conducive to the peace and well-being of these United States.

The Japanese nation demands the surrender of the rights of a sovereign State to control its own affairs. Rights, Mr. Speaker, guaranteed the people of California by our Constitution.

As far as I know there has never been denied to the Japanese the privilege of education; there has only been denied the right to attend the same schools with the white children of California.

And shall we blame the people of this State, the fathers and mothers, for objecting to the enforced association of their daughters with Japanese young men? With the offspring of a nation whose moral standards are at variance with those that western civilization prescribes?

Mr. Speaker, the demand of the people of California for separate schools for white and Mongolian children is primarily a local issue.

The demand for a rigid Japanese exclusion act, not only by the people of that section of this country, but by the great mass of American people in other sections, is a national issue that affects the very existence of every wage-earner in every State in the Union.

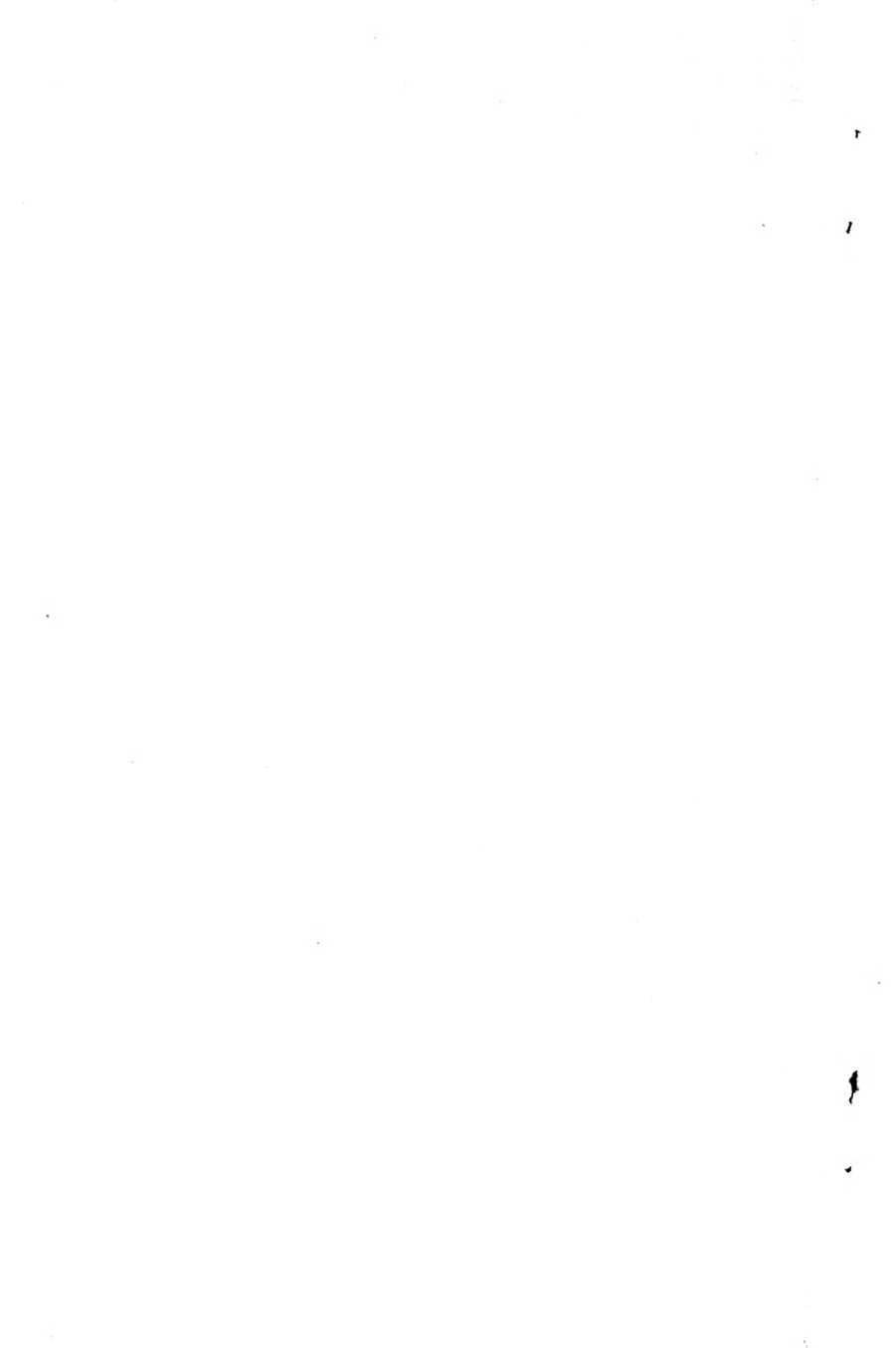
It can hardly be disputed that Japanese immigration affects the interests of our wage-earner in precisely the same manner as do the Chinese, with this added danger: That the superior sense of imitation and adaptability of the Jap enables him to compete in the skilled trades, whereas the Chinese scope of activity is generally confined to the coarser trades. I maintain emphatically that the interests of the American workingman are of greater moment, of greater importance, than the interests or needs of a few corporations or individuals desiring coolly labor.

Now, it seems to me that in common justice to the laborer of this country the Japanese ought to be placed in the same class as the Chinese and excluded. However, Mr. Speaker, this question can not, this question will not, be settled by this delightfully vague amendment.

It will be settled, sir, when the American people, through their representatives, will come to a realization of the fact that the policy of excluding all Asiatic labor is just as essential, just as important, just as justifiable as our adherence to the Monroe doctrine. [Applause.]

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